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THE BASSOON

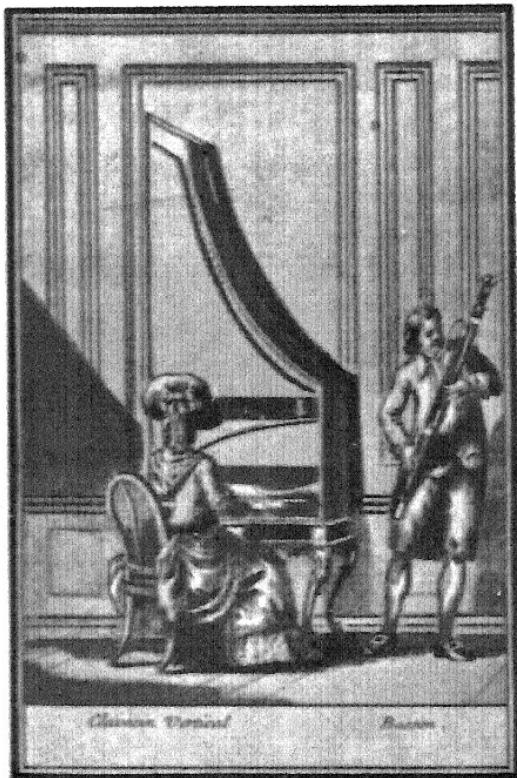
AND

DOUBLE BASSOON

A short illustrated history of their origin, development, and makers

by

LYNDESAY G. LANGWILL



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The bassoon and double bassoon

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THE BASSOON

(Fr. *Basson*; Sp. *Bajon*; Ital. *Fagotto*; Ger. *Fagott*)

By LYNDESAY G. LANGWILL

OF ALL orchestral instruments in normal use, the Bassoon is probably the least well-known or appreciated. A *Times* critic has deplored the unfortunate assonance of buffoon and bassoon—a circumstance which, in some measure, has militated against the proper assessment of the capabilities of this very versatile instrument. It is only within the present century that the history of musical instruments has received the attention it merits, and the writer has found much of interest in his researches into the origin and evolution of the bassoon. Works of reference in many languages repeat with wearisome monotony a few very inaccurate statements concerning its origin.

The writer's paper on "The Bassoon"¹ in 1939 was followed in 1940 by another², by the late Rev. Canon Galpin (that charming and learned musical historian whose death in 1945 was such a loss to musicology). It must seem remarkable that these two recent publications represent the first serious attempts to chronicle the history of an instrument which originated over four centuries ago.

Sixteenth-century Origin

Despite the extreme antiquity of the cane double-reed in music, it is not until the sixteenth century that we hear of its use in combination with a U-tube. Virdung³ (1511) makes no reference to any such type, nor does Agricola⁴ (1528 ar 1545), nor Luscinius⁵ (1536). It is probable that the device of using two parallel channels connected in U-shape to form a con-

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tinuous sound-column can be attributed to Canon Afranio of Ferrara (1480-c. 1560) who about the year 1515 devised an instrument which he named Phagotum. A Latin account of the instrument with two illustrations appeared in 1539, in a treatise by Teseo Albonesi⁶, nephew of Canon Afranio to whom the work is dedicated. Count Valdighi, Librarian of the Este Library, contributed two Italian pamphlets on the Phagotum⁷ (1881 and 1895) dealing with his discovery of a sheet, dated 1565, of Instructions for playing the Phagotum, and Canon Galpin has dealt fully with this curious instrument of which not a specimen or facsimile exists. Valdighi quotes from a book published in Venice in 1621 describing a banquet given by Alphonso, Duke of Ferrara, at Mantua in 1532, at which "Tafelmusik" included performances by "violini e voci", "musica d'una lira", "trombe e cornetti", and, between the fifth and sixth courses, the Revdo. Mess. Afranio played a solo on "il suo fagoto". On the Instructions sheet of 1565, each of the two larger pillars is separately called a *fagoto*, and Canon Galpin is of opinion that "from this narrower and somewhat incorrect use of the word, the name appears to have passed to any bass instrument bored with parallel tubes", irrespective of whether the bore was cylindrical (as in the Phagotum) or conical (as in the primitive bassoon). The Phagotum may be described thus: Two vertical pillars of boxwood each about twenty one inches in height, and each bored with twin cylindrical narrow tubes connected in U-fashion. The compass of the tubes was respectively GG to B natural and c to g¹, three octaves in all. Each tube was sounded by a single-heating metal reed (silver and brass), fed through a bag by bellows strapped under the right arm of the player. The only feature common to the Phagotum and the Bassoon was the boring of two parallel tubes in one block of wood and connecting them at the base. It should be noted that originally the bassoon consisted of a single shaft of wood, and the constant averment that it acquired its Italian name *fagotto*, because it was divided into sections for portability and thus constituted a small faggot is absurd and utterly without foundation.

The Curtall

We may now turn to the Bassoon itself.

First, then, it should be noted that the bassoon is of eight foot tone and is the bass of the double-reed family of wood-

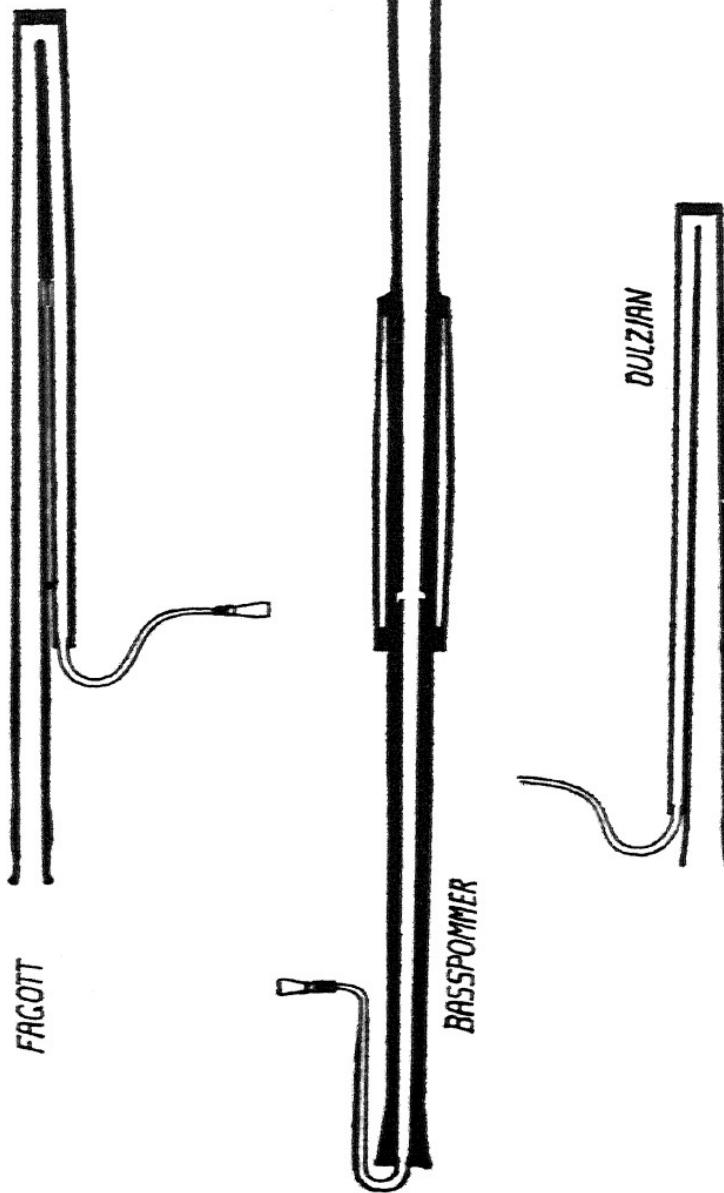


Fig. 1. Cross-sectional diagram of Bassoon, Bass Pommer and Dulzian (after Sack, Berlin Catalogue).

wind. It is customary to term it the bass of the oboe, but the two instruments differ radically in construction and in tone-quality. The word "bassoon" seems to occur first in an English dictionary in 1706, to denote an instrument known then and until about 1740 as the Curtall, Curtail, Curtoll, etc. This curious designation occurs first in the Household Accounts of Sir Thomas Kytson of Hengrave, Suffolk: "1574, Dec. For an instrument called a curtall—xxx s." The wording suggests that the instrument was not well-known, but, in 1603, after Sir Thomas' death, the Inventory specified, *inter alia* "Three hoebboys with a curtall".

In 1575, the Double Curtall was included in the Waits Band of Exeter, and c. 1582 Stephen Batman's translation of a Latin treatise specified the reed instruments of his day: "The common bleting musicke is ye drone, hobius and curtoll", (i.e. bagpipe, oboe and bassoon). In 1597 London Corporation ordered the Chamberlain to provide a Curtall for the city musicians.

The Dulzians and the Pommers

At this time in Germany the bassoon was known as Dulzian or Dolcian, so called, we are informed by Praetorius⁸, because its tone was softer (Ital. dolce) than that of the contemporary straight-tubed Bombard or Pommer, the bass of the Schalmey or Shawm family. *Fig. 1.*

In 1620, the Shawm family in Germany consisted of seven types—two of Schalmeys and five of Bombards (New High German—Pommers): Klein Alt, Alt, Tenor, Bass and Gross Bass. The last two measured some six feet and ten feet respectively. The buzzing of these powerful wide-bored double-reed instruments led to their being termed "Brummers" in Germany. In England the bombard may not have been common because references to it are very rare. Once in the fourteenth century John Gower in his *Confessio Amantis* (c. 1393) writes:

"In suche accord and suche a soun
Of bombarde and of clarionne
With cornemuse and shalmele" . . .

Once in the fifteenth century in the *Squyr of Lowe Degre* (c. 1485) we read:

"There was myrrh and melody . . .
With pypes, organs and bumbarde" . . .

Extracted from Michael Praetorius' "De Organographia," 1619. (See page 22-23.)

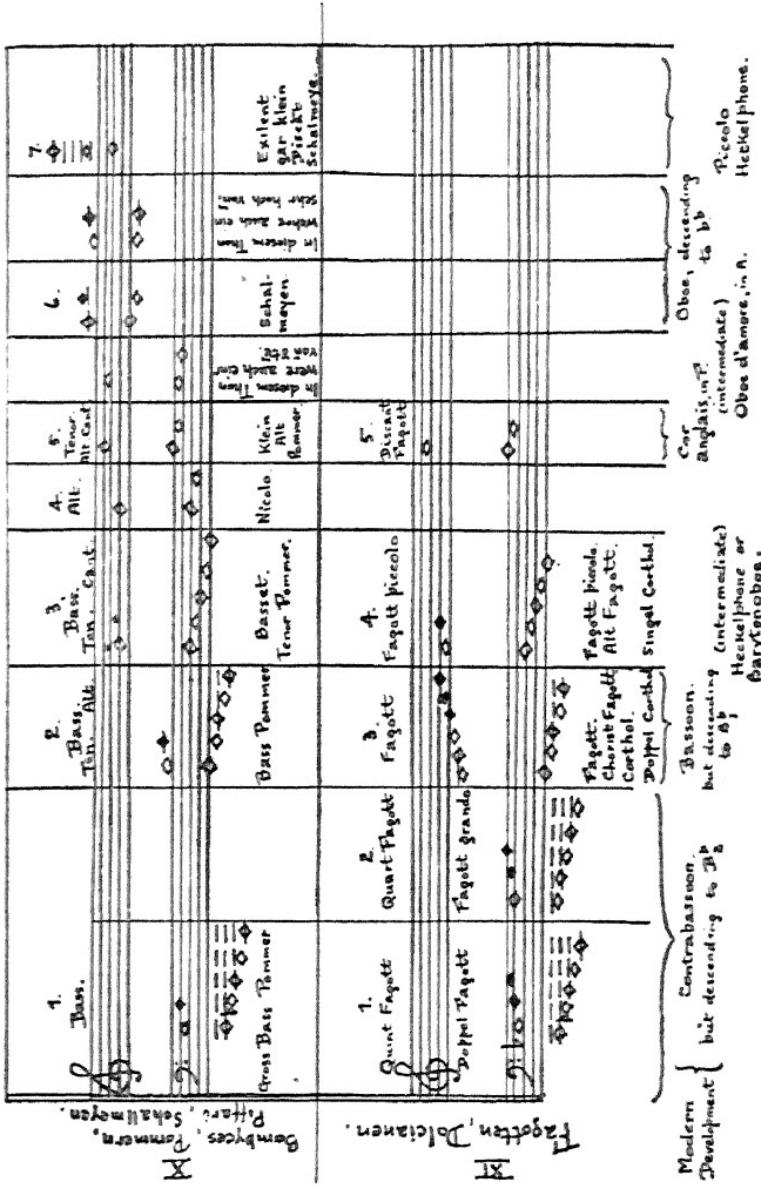


Fig. 2

In the sixteenth century there occurs, in 1546, a reference to the purchase of "a base shalme" (i.e. a bombard) for eleven shillings for the use of Nicholas Wright, a freeman and one of the Waits of York. Thereafter the cumbrous Bass Pommers⁹ were gradually discarded with the advent of the more compact Curtal or Dulzian.

The comparative table (*Fig. 2.*) shows the corresponding members of the Shawm-Bombard family and the Fagotts or Dolcians in 1620, and the modern instruments which have evolved from them.

The type instrument is the Fagott (No. 3) which Praetorius terms Chorist Fagott, Corthol, or Doppel Corthol. It is noteworthy that this instrument appears to have been regarded as peculiarly adapted for use in supporting the voices in churches, and thus we find that Zacconi¹⁰ (1596) mentions the Fagotto Chorista with a compass C, to b flat. (Praetorius takes it up to g.). The sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were remarkable for the large instrumental families employed. Praetorius details the composition of an Accort or Stimmwerk—eighty-six wind instruments of nine different kinds (Sorte or Art), including thirteen Pommers and Shawms, and the following eight Fagotte:

1 Discant Fagott	Doppel Fagotte:
2 Fagott Piccolo	1 Quart Fagott descending to Contra G
3 Chorist Fagott	1 Quint Fagott descending to Contra F

Note the absence of any Doppel Fagott descending to Contra C an octave below the Chorist Fagott.

Plate X in *Theatrum Instrumentorum* depicts the various sizes of Fagott drawn to scale of Brunswick feet. (1 Brunswick foot equals 11.235 English inches or 285.36 mm.) German Inventars mention a "Dultzian" at Brandenburg in 1580, "Dolzoni" at Dresden in 1593, and Discant Tenor and Chorist Fagotte at Stuttgart in 1589. The Inventars of 1577-90 of the Archduke Charles of Austria specify "Bassdulzani": and the Ambras Inventar of 1596 includes "Tolzanae".

Spanish, Belgian and Flemish References

A Spanish Inventory of 1555 of the property of Maria, widow of Louis II, King of Hungary, on her leaving Flanders for Spain mentions "two contrabass musical instruments

called *fagotes* placed in two cylindrical cases", and these instruments are distinguished from two contrabass chirimias (shawms), i.e. bombards, which were in two pieces, each instrument in "a great case". A "Fagot contra alt" is also mentioned. Van der Straeten¹¹ who records these facts, also states that in 1578 Philip van Ranst was appointed Court Fagottist at Brussels. In 1581 a fagotto was included in the orchestra for a ballet composed for the marriage of Margaret of Lorraine. In 1613 Cerone¹² includes the *Fagote*.



Fig. 3

The Dulzian in Belgium

It is very interesting that two paintings of a group of six wind musicians of c. 1616 have survived. The first, reproduced here, (Fig. 3) is from a picture by Denis van Alsloot, dated 1616, preserved in the National Museum, Madrid. The picture represents "The Procession of the Religious Orders of the Town of Antwerp on the day of the Fête de la Vierge du Rosaire". The six musicians are painted with great precision, and from right to left the instruments are: Trombone, Alto Pommer, Discant Schalmey, a Cornetto, a second Alto Pommer, and a Dulzian played at the left thigh with right hand uppermost—the converse of the modern manner of

holding the Bassoon. It is noteworthy that the bass here is supplied by a Dulzian and not by a Pommer. (Fig. 4) Mahillon¹³ has drawn attention to the curious fact that the same musicians with identical instruments appear in two pictures by Antoine Sallaert in the Musée royal de peinture de Bruxelles. One of these represents "La Procession des Pucelles du Sablon", the other "L'Infante Isabelle abattant l'oiseau au tir du grand Serment". Did the Antwerp musicians take part in the Brussels festivities, or did Sallaert merely borrow his ideas from van Alsloot, whose pupil he may have been? Dr. Geiringer reproduces part of a third painting by Sallaert in Turin, in which appears a group of similar musicians, but he is in error in describing it as of the sixteenth century. Sallaert was born in Brussels, c. 1590, inscribed as pupil painter in 1606, and master painter in 1613. His painting must therefore be of the seventeenth century and is most probably subsequent to Alsloot's painting of 1616. These authentic representations of a continental wind-band of 1616 deserve greater attention than they have as yet received.



Fig. 4. Dulzian and Bass-Pommer.

Surviving Early Dulzians

A very remarkable collection of late sixteenth and early seventeenth century Italian Dulzians is preserved in the Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna¹⁴, and three (Nos. 195, 199 and 201) illustrate the one-piece, two-piece and three-piece types, (exclusive of the "crook" or mouth-tube).¹⁵ Several of these Vienna Dulzians are constructed to suit what may be termed left-handed players, as in the Van Alsloot painting. Around the bell of one well-preserved Dulzian in Vienna (Fig. 5) is engraved the quaint verse:

"Der Dulcian bin ich genant
Nit (nicht) einem jedem wol pekat (bekannt)
Der mich will recht pfeifen
Der mus mich wol lerne (lernen) greifen."

A typical two-keyed Chorist-Fagott dated 1605, and listed in the Inventar of the Frankfurter Kapellmusik of 1625 is preserved in the Frankfurt Museum. Another is (or was) in

the Hamburg Museum, and a remarkable pair of Dulzians (Nos. 1360-61) in the former Heyer-Cologne Collection, now in Leipzig University. One by Johann Christoph Denner of Nuremberg whose name is associated with the improvement of the clarinet, c. 1690, is a "Gedackt Chorist-Fagott". During the seventeenth century, German Dulzians were

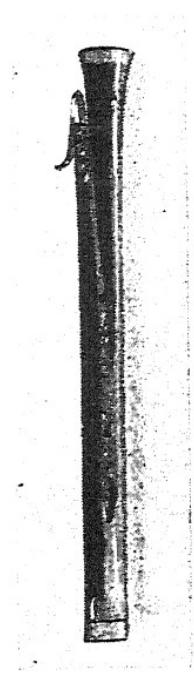


Fig. 5

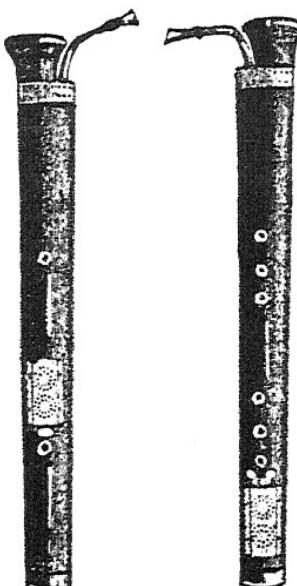


Fig. 6. Back and front views of 2-keyed Dulzian (Brussels Conservatoire Museum).

termed "offen" or "gedackt," depending upon the absence or presence of a small perforated capsule placed over the mouth of the bell to subdue the tone. The other Leipzig specimen is a two-keyed Doppel Fagott, either a Quart- or Quint-Fagott, a rare survival from the seventeenth century.

In Berlin Hochschule Museum are eight Dulzians—alto, tenor and chorist—of which five are "offen" and three "gedackt". The Paris Conservatoire Museum contains only one Dulzian and it is in very poor condition. The Brussels Conservatoire Museum, however, has a unique collection of four small Spanish Dulzians (*bajoncillo*) Nos. 2327-2330) from

the Barbieri Collection in Madrid, pitched in G, C, D and G, being respectively a fifth, an octave, a ninth and twelfth above the type instrument (Chorist-Fagott). (*Fig. 6*). Forsyth¹⁶ states that "most museums possess well-preserved examples of these instruments, and there are many in the hands of private collectors". The writer does not know of a single Dulzian in Britain—not even a facsimile—in public or private ownership.

The establishment of a thoroughly representative National Collection of Musical Instruments is among the objects of the Galpin Society founded in 1946 to perpetuate the work and interests of the late Canon F. W. Galpin.

Transformation of Dulzian to Bassoon

It is impossible to say precisely when in the seventeenth century the Dulzian became transformed (a) by separation of the bass-joint and wing-joint which connect through the U-shaped butt and (b) by the addition of the bell-joint which constitutes a prolongation of the bass-joint and enables the production of Contra B flat—the lowest note of the instrument to this day. Praetorius does not show any such type in 1620, and if we turn to Mersenne¹⁷ we see several types designated "Fagot ou Basson" or "Tarot", but though some have one or two keys more than the normal two of the Dulzian, all types are still Dulzians in essence. Mersenne does not give us the actual compass of these types, but he adds that the "Bassons" are not all of the same size, there being some which descend a third or a fourth lower. The range is only a tenth or an eleventh. Kircher¹⁸ (1650) mentions the "Dulcignum" or "Fagotto" and shows an engraving identical with that given in Mersenne.

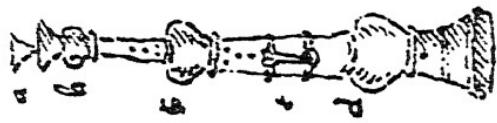
The earliest occurrence of Contra B flat appears to be in an exercise published at Venice in 1638, in the form of variations for Fagotto Solo with Basso Continuo, by a monk Fray Bartolomé de Selma y Salaverde.

Ante 1688, the third Randle Holme (d. 1707) in his MS. *The Academy of Armoury* preserved in the British Museum, gives the first English drawing and description of the Double Curtaile: (*Fig. 7*)

The text runs: "A double curtaile. This is double the bignesse of the single, mentioned Ch. XVI, n. 6" (the MS. begins at Ch. XVII of book 3) "and is played eight notes deeper. It is as it were two pipes fixed in on(e) thick bass pipe, one much

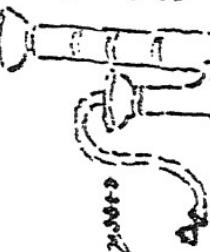
A French Hoboy

A Double Curtail



- A strange Hology, it caught's in
a few Roads
C. few types most
c. like we able 2000
d. few provision or better posted
E. few Bro's Kegs.

I wanted not go in, only do one other



A double container this is double &
consists of two single containers
See 16. n. 6. It is yellowish
yellow. It is about 2 inches
diameter on thick base pointing out
and longer than ten fingers, from
top of the powder comes a crook-
ed piece of Brass in form of an S
in which is fixed a Reed, through
it the wind passes to make the
instrument make a sound.

On great sides of the mountain back part and 2 drafts Krys, the highest called
Soulter. La Sol m. The other opposite double & m.

longer than the other, from the top of the lower comes a crooked pipe of brass in form of an S in which is fixt a Reed, through it the wind passeth to make the instrument make a sound. It hath six holes on the outside and one brass key called the double F fa ut: on that side next the man or back part are two brass keys, the highest called double La" (error for D) "sol re, and the other double B mi".

This transcription is given in full, in view of certain errors and omissions in the Encyclo. Brit. 11th Ed. (s.v. Bassoon). We have here valuable evidence that the Dulzian had, since 1636, acquired a separate bass-joint, a wing-joint, and a bell-joint, and the three keys, named according to the Gamut, are the D and F of the Dulzian, plus Contra B flat. Holme omits to mention the two thumb-holes on the back of the Curtale!

During the seventeenth century English references to the Curtal become more frequent. A few instances will suffice.

At a service in St. George's Chapel, Windsor, held on April 17, 1661, by order of the Sovereign and the Knights of the Garter "two double sackbuts and two double courtals" were "placed . . . among the . . . choirs, to the end that all might distinctly hear". The Lord Chamberlain's Records state:

Aug. 30, 1662: "Order that Robert Strong and Edward Strong are to attend with their double curtolls in His Majesty's Chappell Royall at Whitehall . . . every Sunday and Holyday. . . ."

June 20, 1663: "Warrant to pay Edward Strong, musician, the sum of £50 for three good curtalls, by him bought and delivered for his Majesty's service".

Nov. 30, 1669: "Warrant to pay the sum of £52 to Robert Strong, one of his Majesty's musicians in ordinary, for two double curtolls bought and delivered for their Majesties' service, and given to Segnior Francisco for the service of the Queene's Majesty".

In 1678 the Common Council of Coventry appointed four Town Waits and after prescribing their salary, livery and duties mentions their instruments, "two treables, one tenor and a double curtall, all of them to be tunable". The quaint proviso was probably inserted as a result of sad experience of the waits' intonation in the past!

The sackbut, as the trombone was then called, and the double curtal figured in the procession at the Coronation of James II on April 23, 1685. The choir of Westminster was

followed by three of the King's Musicians each in a scarlet mantle—Edmond Flower and Theophilus Fittz each playing a sackbut, and, between them, Henry Gregory “playing on a Double Courtal”. It is amusing to observe that the engraver in the illustrations appended to Francis Sandford's *History*



Fig. 8

of the Coronation of James I portrays these three musicians with two large trumpets and a tenor cornetto!

Hawkins¹⁹ states that the courtal figured again in 1714 at the Coronation of George I.

Fig. 8²⁰ shows “Les douze grands hautbois du Roi” at the Coronation of Louis XV in 1722. Ten oboes have as bass two bassoons—seen in the background.

Before we leave the seventeenth century we may note a Scottish reference, and the spelling assumes a Scottish form—“curlte”. Edinburgh Town Council had for a century employed five waits whose instruments were “schalmes, howboyes and

siclyk" (such like). On April 17, 1696, however, the Council appointed players on "the French hautboyes and double curtle", instruments considered far more proper than those hitherto in use—a reference no doubt to the cornetti then going out of fashion.

A particularly valuable piece of evidence is afforded by a German woodcut by Johann Christoff Weigel of Nuremberg in 1698²¹ (Fig. 9). It affords clear proof that this was a transition



Alter Fagottbauer bei der Arbeit in seiner Werkstatt

Ende des 17. Jahrhunderts.

Nach Christoff Weigel, Nürnberg 1698.

Fig. 9

period from Dulzian to Bassoon. The Bassoon-maker is at work on a Dulzian, boring the finger-holes, while on the floor beside him lies a second Dulzian. Leaning against his bench, however, is a three-keyed bassoon of transitional form with elaborate mouldings turned on the lathe. One of a set of "Farbige Stiche" by Weigel shows a left-handed bassoon-player with a bassoon identical with that leaning against the bench in the woodcut.

Eighteenth-century Development

The two-keyed Dulzian, for which Daniel Speer²² published

a fingering-chart at Ulm in 1697 was no longer in fashion in 1738 according to Eisel²³ who gave fingering-charts for it (calling it "Teutsche Basson") and for the four-keyed bassoon. Majer²⁴ in 1732 and 1741 shows the three-keyed type described in Walther's Lexikon²⁵ of 1732. The fourth key (G sharp for little finger) was certainly added circa 1700, as it is shown in an Address-Card²⁶ of circa 1705 of Coenraad Rykel, master flute-maker, born in Amsterdam in 1667 and apprenticed in 1679 to his uncle, Richard Haka, whose partner he became until Haka's death c. 1705.

It is but another of the many inaccurate statements about the bassoon that the fourth key dates from 1751—merely because the four-keyed type is depicted in a plate in Diderot and D'Alembert's Encyclopédie which appeared in Paris from 1751 onwards.

Mattheson²⁷ in 1713 describes "der stolze Basson" and gives its compass as C to f, or g; (i.e. a Dulzian) adding that occasionally Contra B flat and even A are found (i.e. on the 'new' Bassoon). It is doubtful if A could be produced with a slack lip by forcing B flat downwards. For the next century, however, B natural was obtained by "pinching", i.e. forcing B flat upwards. The mention of low A in 1713 anticipates Wagner's direction as a result of which Heckel of Biebrich made an extended bell-joint for the bassoon and added an extra thumb-key to give low A.

Both "Bassoon" and "Double Curtail" occur in Phillip's Dictionary of 1706, but "Curtail" is not given in any musical sense and we may conclude that the Single Curtail was no longer in use. It is almost certain that it was never commonly employed. The adjective "double" denoted a curtal descending below G (e.g. to CC according to earlier English nomenclature).

English references to the Curtal usually allude to its pitch or tone-quality. Edward Ward in 1707 uses the expression "With voice as hoarse as double curtal". A contemporary broadside describing the York Waits in a doggerel rhyme mentions:

"Cortal with deep hum hum
Cries out, 'We come, we come.' "

At Exeter in 1737—160 years after the first mention of the curtall there—we read in an account of Christmas customs:

"The Waits may now, in blackest month go through
Ev'n the suspicious Close of Bartho'mew
Nor by that Calvary hear dismal groan
But dismal from that snuffing Courtal blown."

The military bands then coming into existence readily adopted the curtal. Thus, on June 7, 1722 "one hautboy and one courtal" were added to the Grenadiers' Music (of the H.A.C.)²⁸ and on Oct. 11, 1731, "the Grenadiers' Music was ordered to consist of one curtal, three hautboys and no more." By 1783 the word "curtail" was dropped and the band consisted of four clarinets, two horns, one trumpet, two "bassoons".

A curious instance of the two names in association occurs in a British Museum MS. of Dr. Robert Creighton, dated 1727:

"I hear a Thunder rolling here beneath,
Where Curtals and Bassoons their murmurs breathe."

Handel with one notable exception in *Saul* normally used the bassoon merely to double the bass, and while he invariably designated it "fagotto", another British Museum MS. (not later than 1732) states that Handel's pastoral *Acis* needed a Double Curtal for the accompaniment of some of the songs.

Grassineau's Musical Dictionary of 1740 contains probably the last use of the word curtal—a word which sank into oblivion after two centuries during which there can be no doubt that the instrument was in far wider use than the recorded instances of the word would appear to indicate.

Increased Key Mechanism

The additions of the fifth and sixth closed keys (E flat and F sharp) was almost simultaneous. It is probable that E flat (for left thumb on French and English bassoons, and for left little finger on German bassoons) was the earlier of the two keys. It appears in Paris fingering-charts of Abrahame²⁹ and Laborde³⁰, both circa 1780. In the writer's collection of photographs of some 400 bassoons in public and private collections throughout the world there is only one instance of a five-keyed bassoon with F sharp as the fifth key and it is clearly a later addition. Mozart's Bassoon Concerto would be performed on a four-keyed instrument and it was not until nearly the close of the century that the six-keyed bassoon was standard.

The Bassoon's Entry to the Orchestra

The earliest scores to include Fagotte are those of Heinrich Schütz (1585–1672), who employed two in 1619, three in 1621

and five in 1625. Lesser known composers mentioned by Lavoix³¹ who also included the Bassoon were:

M. Neri—a sonata for 12 instruments including a bassoon (Venice, 1651); P. F. Boddecker—a sonata for Bassoon and figured Bass (Strasburg, 1651); and N. Gletté—*Expeditiones musicae* (1667–1670), of which the Fifth Series includes Bassoon.

These were all prior to Lully's use of the instrument in the French Opera in *Psyché* (1674). Nearly every book of reference asserts that Cambert first introduced the Bassoon in the orchestra in his *Pomone* (1671). The writer has definite information from the Library of the Paris Conservatoire that the fragmentary MS. music of *Pomone* mentions "haut-bois" but not "bassons". It must be remembered, however, that the later seventeenth century composers commonly used their wood-wind in unison with the strings, merely adding, e.g., *con* or *senza fagotti* as required, and the bassoon may indeed have taken part in *Pomone*. In any case even prior to Cambert, Cesti in his opera *Il pomo d'oro* (1667–68) used fagotti and two cornetti, three trombones and a regal (small organ) to suggest the terrors of Hades.

Pezelius (1674 and 1682), Benoît de Saint Joseph in a mass of 1680, Marc-Antoine Charpentier in *Medée* (1693), Marin Marais in *Alcyone* in 1706, and Montéclair in *Jephté* in 1732 all included fagotti.

Bach's Use of the Bassoon³²

Bach regarded e flat¹ or f sharp¹ as the normal upward limit and only in the period 1731–34 did he exceed this, in three Cantatas 97, 149, and 177 with g¹, and in No. 42 and the "Quoniam" of the *Hohe Messe* with a¹. He first introduced the Bassoon in 1708 in Cantata 71 using the compass B flat,—c¹. In only five scores does he take it below C—in four of these to an occasional B flat or B natural (the latter then a note of bad quality and uncertain intonation), and in one case—Cantata No. 31 of 1715—he takes it down to G, requiring the Quart-Fagott. In 1723 and 1731 Bach employs the unique designations "Bassono" and "Bassono grosso".

The Bassoon as a Church Instrument

The statutory ban imposed in 1644 on church organs in England led to the introduction of instrumental accompaniment sometimes supplied by the Waits of a municipality, more frequently by amateurs whose Christmas music-making and carol-singing gained for them at that season the title of Waits.

Thus for over two centuries the West Gallery of many an English church accommodated a small group playing violin, flute or clarinet, sometimes oboe, and almost invariably a 'cello or bassoon or serpent. Churchwardens' Accounts contain frequent references to the bassoon. At Bunbury, Cheshire, in 1712 a Church bassoon was bought for £5 5s. At Cockshutt, Salop, in 1818, a bassoon cost £2 10s.

Reference has been made in several publications to the arrival of a church bassoon being made the occasion of special rejoicing. Apparently both singers and instrumentalists were supplied with liquid refreshment at the direction of the Churchwardens; thus at Hayfield, Derbyshire, in 1772, they record: "Spent with singers when the new Bazoon came, 2s. 6d." and "Charges when the Bassoun came, 3s. 6d.". In the Victoria and Albert Museum there is a well-known painting by Thomas Webster, R.A., entitled "The Village Choir" believed to be that of Bow Brickhill, Bucks., circa 1846. The Parish Clerk leads the praise in the West Gallery and among the singers are performers on Clarinet, Bassoon and 'Cello.

Many old church bassoons are still preserved in the churches in which they were used, e.g., Balsham (Cambs.); Church Broughton, (Derbyshire); Buxted (Sussex); Boldre (Hants.); Glan Conway, (Denbighshire); Kingston (I.o.W.); etc., and others are in private ownership. The writer has a four-keyed bassoon by Cahusac, London, dated 1769, used in Brailes Church, Oxfordshire, and a six-keyed bassoon by G. Astor and Co., London (c. 1798) used in Sellinge Church, Kent. Provincial museums, too, possess numbers of such instruments, e.g., the Bucks. County Museum, where an Astor eight-keyed Bassoon formerly played in Hawridge Church, Bucks., bears the following verse:

"I hear some men hate music, let them show
In holy writ what else the angels do;
Then those who do despise such sacred mirth
Are neither fit for heaven nor for earth."

All interested in this vanished feature of church praise are indebted to the researches of the Rev. Canon K. H. MacDermott³³. Of one hundred and eleven Sussex parishes, twenty-two had a bassoon. Continuing his researches to England as a whole, the Canon has written a further book, shortly to be published, and has compiled an index of parishes in which a church band is known to have existed. Every

English county is represented except Westmorland and Huntingdonshire. The disappearance of these village bands dates from the arrival of the barrel organ and, after 1840, of the harmonium. Thomas Hardy's account of this in *Under the Greenwood Tree* is too well-known to need quotation here. The church band of Winterborne Abbas, Dorset, continued to function until c. 1895.

Nineteenth-century Development

The realisation of the value of the bassoon as a tenor instrument led to the desire to extend its upper register. Thus \sharp , regarded as the upper limit by Mozart, and by Haydn and Beethoven in their earlier works, was first extended to \flat by the addition of a wing-key operated by the left thumb and assisting in the production of the twelfth of d in the fundamental scale. One such key is present on the seven-keyed bassoon in Ozi's French *Méthode de Basson* of 1803. A second wing-key was soon added and as the first gave \flat , \flat flat, and \natural natural, the second gave \sharp , \sharp sharp, and \natural . Koch's Lexikon of 1802 specifies seven keys without low F sharp, and he states that the two wing-keys are to be found "only on modern bassoons". He also mentions "that many play even up to \natural ". For this, in some cases, a third wing-key was added, and further additional keys carried the compass up to \flat .

The German Bassoon

From this time two distinct types of bassoon began to be evolved in Germany and France respectively, and each acquired peculiarities of construction, bore, distribution of the holes, and key mechanism, resulting in considerable differentiation in tone quality. Among celebrated German bassoon-makers of the late eighteenth century were K. A. Grenser (1720–1807) and his nephew and successor J. H. Grenser (1764–1813), and Grundmann, all of Dresden. The so-called "Dresdner Fagott", however, was defective by reason of inequalities and inaccuracies in intonation—capable of only partial correction by cross-fingering or "gabel griff" (forking). Carl Almenraeder (1786–1843), a proficient performer, set himself to remedy these defects under the guidance of Gottfried Weber (1779–1839), celebrated as a theorist, acoustician, and writer. In 1817 Almenraeder experimented in Schott's factory at Mainz and published his findings in a

treatise in 1820³⁴, describing a fifteen-keyed bassoon. This and subsequent improvements upon it were expounded by Gottfried Weber in 1825 and 1828 in *Caecilia*,³⁵ a periodical which he founded and edited until his death. In 1831 Almenraeder entered into partnership with J. A. Heckel (1812–1877) at Biebrich am Rhein, and it is no exaggeration to say that the perfecting of the German bassoon since then has taken place in the Heckel factory under three successive generations. The second Heckel, Wilhelm (1856–1909) published in 1899 "Der Fagott", and in 1931, the centenary year of the Firm, his son, Wilhelm H. Heckel, (b. 1879), re-published the booklet with many illustrations. The writer was privileged to be the guest of Herr Heckel in 1933 when the latter revised and discussed the writer's translation of "Der Fagott" of which a résumé was published in the American *Journal of Musicology*³⁶. A visit to the Heckel workshop and to the firm's rich instrumental museum is an education in itself. The premises escaped war damage and manufacture has been resumed on a small scale.

Almenraeder's *Fagottschule* first published in 1841 is for a fifteen- or sixteen-keyed bassoon. Weissenborn's *Schule* of 1885 deals with the twenty-one-keyed Heckel bassoon which by then had become more or less standardised.

Ebonite Lining of Wing-Joint

It is inevitable that the wood of an instrument in daily use is gradually destroyed by the moisture which tends to penetrate the pores of the wood, and while the damage can be minimised by careful drying and the application of sweet almond oil, W. Heckel took out in 1889 a German Patent for ebonite lining of the bore of the wing-joint and of the narrower tube of the butt-joint, moisture rarely passing beyond the base of the butt. This ebonite takes on a mirror-like and absolutely non-porous surface which facilitates a brightness of tone and readiness of response otherwise unattainable. There is no increase in weight and the utmost exactness in the cone of the bore is permanent. Heckel prefers maplewood both because of its weight and because it is so easily worked. It can be bored smooth, the cone is durable and the instrument can be saturated with oil. Needless to say the ebonite lining has been adopted by many makers and is found on bassoons of all types, and as Morton of London fitted this lining as early as 1875, Heckel can hardly claim priority of invention.

Advantages Claimed for German Bassoons

From the technical point of view the German bassoon is said to be more even throughout its compass than the French type, and offers many alternative fingerings and greater facility in the upper register which Heckel has extended to a flatⁱⁱ—an amazing compass of four octaves all but a tone. The writer has heard Herr Heckel produce a flatⁱⁱ, but it is questionable if notes above cⁱⁱ are worth the effort and anxiety entailed in their production.

The French Bassoon

It is from the *Livre Commode* of Borjon (1692) that we learn the names of the principal French wood-wind makers of the late seventeenth century. Colin Hotteterre and his son Jean, Fillebert, Des Costeaux, Philidor, Du Mont, Rousselet, Dupuis and half a dozen more. None of their bassoons, however, survive.

The more important eighteenth century makers were Thomas Lot, Jacques Delusse, Christophe Delusse and Prudent Thierriot. Others who worked into the nineteenth century were Dominique Porthaux (1782–1824) who conceived the strange idea of a wooden crook instead of one of metal; Michel Amlingue and Savary père. These were followed by Jean Nicolas Savary (*Savary jeune*) (1786–c. 1850). After taking Premier Prix in Bassoon at Paris Conservatoire in 1808, Savary jeune was for a time in the orchestra of the Theatre Italien, before devoting himself to the making of bassoons. He devised many improvements and his instruments were copied by many makers as Savary bassoons were highly esteemed by both French and English players until the adoption of low pitch.

The business of Savary was bought by Galander who c. 1853 invented a military Bassoon in B flat with a widely flared metal bell. This type he named *Galandonome* and what is probably the only surviving specimen is in the Metropolitan Museum, New York. In 1854 Georges Schubert purchased and combined the Paris businesses of Savary-Galand and of F. G. Adler, but on G. Schubert's death in 1857 the concern was wound up.

Other makers of the period 1800–1830 were Pezé, Baumann, Nicolas Winnen and his son Jean (1795–1867) who invented in 1839 a metal bassoon with wide bore and bell for military use. It was called *Bassonore* (Fr. “Basse” and “sonore”), but

it did not succeed. A specimen may be seen in the Paris Conservatoire Museum (No. 511).

Jacques François Simiot of Lyons, who published an account of his clarinet improvements in 1808, is credited with having already added a wing-key for a^{\flat} and keys for low B natural and C sharp. His keys were of a new kind, more elegant, lighter and stronger than before. In 1817 he replaced the cork plug closing the butt-joint by a metal U-tube, capable of being withdrawn at will to remove water, and this device likewise had the advantage of making continuity in the conical course of the bore. He also gave a "flare" to the bell to increase the volume. This we learn from *Le Moniteur Universel* of Nov. 1817, but it is unfortunate and alike remarkable that only one bassoon of Simiot appears to have survived—a nine-key instrument in Arts et Métiers Museum, Paris. The documentary evidence mentioned above is important in considering the claims of Germany to priority of invention.

Frédéric Guillaume Adler of Paris (c. 1809–1854) exhibited improved fifteen-key bassoons in 1827; again in 1839 with two new keys for d' and $e\ flat'$, and in 1844 with a Contrabassoon and a Bassoon with a metal bell. (It is a coincidence that Adler is the name of a modern German maker of Markneukirchen, noted for his bassoons).

The So-called Boehm Bassoon

No account of French wood-wind could be complete without mention of the Triéberts. Guillaume (1770–1848) was a German oboe-maker who became a naturalised Frenchman and worked in Paris until his death. His sons Charles-Louis (1810–67) and Frédéric (1813–78) were both skilled oboists and the management of the family business was largely left to Frédéric who gained renown as an oboe-maker. Theobald Boehm, famed as an improver of the flute, designed an improved twenty-nine-keyed bassoon and employed Triébert to make the type exhibited by him in Paris in 1855 and in London in 1862. Only three of these very complicated Triébert-Boehm Bassoons were made—one is in Brussels (No. 5119) and another in Paris (No. 510). The attempt failed because of the excessive weight, high cost (some £60 c. 1875), numerous keys which it was difficult to maintain air-tight, and most of all, the effect of the altered position and depth of the lateral holes in denaturalising the timbre.

Associated with Triébert was A. Marzoli, bassoonist at the

Théâtre Italien where he attempted to play the so-called "Boehm Bassoon". A twenty-eight-keyed example stamped "A. Marzoli à Paris" was lent by Canon Galpin at the R. M. Exhibition 1890 and is now in the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

As early as 1825 C. J. Sax (*père*) exhibited at Haarlem a bassoon with covered holes and in 1842 he took out a Belgian patent for a metal bassoon on this system.

Meanwhile in London Cornelius Ward had devised a similar type with twenty-three keys, and this he exhibited at the Great Exhibition of 1851 and patented in 1853. Ward's bassoon was highly praised by Giuseppe Tamplini who in 1847 became first bassoon at Her Majesty's Theatre, London, and was Musical Director of the H.A.C. Tamplini in 1847 was staying with Ward and obtained his collaboration as inventor and maker in the manufacture of a first model. This in 1851 he took to Paris and showed to Triébert and Marzoli who, however, were already in negotiation with Boehm for a bassoon of his designing. The failure of these attempts, Tamplini ascribed to "ignorance, prejudice, habit and principally the private interests which always militate against any progress in the art of music". In 1872 Tamplini returned to his native Italy and in 1888 at the Bologna Exhibition he exhibited the model Ward had made for him forty years before. He had even persuaded a Bologna maker, Vezzelli, to improve the key-mechanism, and a teacher at the Liceo to study the instrument. Poor Tamplini! His dreams were never fulfilled. He died at Bologna on Sept. 11 of the same year (1888) and no one since has ever troubled further with the "Boehm-system Bassoon".

The Modern French Bassoon

The last and probably the greatest name in French bassoon-making is Buffet. Buffet-Auger, who founded the celebrated Paris instrument-making business in 1825, was succeeded in 1830 by his son who secured a mention at the Exhibition of 1839. In 1836 he married Mdlle. Crampon and added his wife's surname to his own to distinguish his business from that of an uncle, Louis-Auguste Buffet (d. 1885). Throughout many changes in proprietorship the business has maintained the name Buffet-Crampon (except from 1855 to 1859 when it was styled Tournier and Goumas). In 1885 Goumas sold the business to Paul Evette and Ernest Schaeffer. Buffet-Crampon

are still to-day the leading French bassoon-makers, but Selmer, Cabart and Thibouville also make good bassoons.

Belgian Bassoons

Chief among eighteenth century Belgian makers were the Tuerlinckx, a Malines family who from about 1770 till 1855 made excellent wood-wind instruments, including bassoons and contrabassoons. In the Brussels Conservatoire is preserved the account book of the business from 1784 to 1818 and it forms the subject of an excellent history by R. van Aerde *Les Tuerlinckx, luthiers à Malines* (1914). As the founder worked at a time of invasion he was entrusted with the repair of French, German and Austrian instruments, the peculiarities of which he could study at leisure.

Though the name of Sax is generally associated with Paris, it may be remarked that Charles Joseph Sax (*père*), the earliest to acquire fame, was born at Dinant in 1791. In 1815 he opened a workshop in Brussels and became maker to the Court and to the Belgian army. Reference has already been made to the metal bassoon he patented in 1842. He died at Paris in 1865. Charles' fame, however, was eclipsed by that of his son Antoine-Joseph, called Adolphe, born at Dinant in 1814. He set up in Paris in 1842 and patented no fewer than thirty-five inventions. In 1842, Sax *fils*, like his father, also took out a Belgian patent for a bassoon with large covered holes bored at acoustically correct intervals. Sax thus anticipated the Triébert-Boehm Bassoon by some ten years. Despite the unquestioned ingenuity and skill of both Sax *père et fils*, the latter's twenty-three-keyed bassoon, though highly commended in London in 1851, was a failure. Its invention, like all others on this principle, is now of no more than academic interest.

Mention must also be made of G. Bachmann (1804—1842) of Brussels, the predecessor of Mahillon et Cie, founded in 1836 by Charles Mahillon (1813—1889) and Victor Mahillon (1841—1924). Victor Mahillon was also Conservateur of the comprehensive Brussels Conservatoire Museum for which he compiled an excellent Catalogue in five volumes (1893—1922). Mahillon bassoons (French system) were widely used before the first World War.

Single-reed Mouthpiece

In Sax *père's* Patent description of July 7, 1842, he depicts a "nouvelle embouchure" which is yet another indication of

the early use of a clarinet-type beak-mouthpiece in connection with a double-reed instrument. Such a mouthpiece was used on the short-lived Alto Fagotto invented by a Scotsman, William Meikle, of Strathaven, and manufactured by Wood of 50, New Compton Street, Soho, c. 1830. Sax fils in due course adapted the clarinet mouthpiece to a conical metal tube and thus invented the Saxophone (1840).

Great Britain

The Stanesbys, father and son, in the eighteenth century made excellent bassoons, one of which, dated 1747, was recently sold at the auction of the remaining instruments of Canon Galpin. Gedney, Küsder, Milhouse (of Newark and London), Astor, Goulding, Gerock, Bilton, Key, Preston, Proser, Wood, Ward, Samme, Morton, Wrede, Royan, Boosey were all makers in the period 1750–1900, and Boosey's business alone survived in the merger with Messrs. Hawkes. Boosey & Hawkes, Ltd., indeed have almost the monopoly in this country, and they acquired the methods and in some cases the tools of earlier firms, notably Morton. Boosey & Hawkes make the French type for the British Army bands, and the German type for sale to an ever-increasing number of professional orchestral musicians.

Italy

The chief makers are Maino & Orsi, and Sili of Milan, and Giorgi & Schaffner of Florence, all making bassoons almost exactly of French type.

Spain

It is remarkable that Spain possesses no wood-wind maker. The French type is standard, though F. Quintana has invented a modification of the key-system claiming that it renders playable some passages otherwise impossible.

U.S.A.

Although twenty years ago the French type was in general use in the States, the position now is wholly reversed, and the German type may almost be termed standard, though both types are made by Conn, Selmer, etc.

Czechoslovakia

In the old district, known as Bohemia, of this State, there were in the nineteenth century many excellent bassoon-makers: Horak, Ludwig, Rott, Schamal, etc.

Until 1939 makers supplied the German type almost exclusively, e.g. Riedl, and Kohlert, both of Graslitz. In 1928–30, V. Kohlert's Söhne sold one thousand, two hundred and thirty-three Bassoons and Contrabassoons.

The Bassoon in the Orchestra

Forsyth gives an excellent account of the modern bassoon and its uses, though he depicts only a French type. It will supply holding notes in the middle register, quietly moving passages in the middle of the harmony, and unobtrusive figures covering a wide range, and “its quiet self-effacing tone makes it . . . an ideal background instrument”. On the other hand “unless well uncovered the tone-colour is apt to be lost in the surrounding instrumental haze”. An example is the Andantino of Bizet’s First *L’Arlésienne* Suite, where the bassoons’ counterpoint in staccato triplets marked “piano” is almost inaudible.

Prout was wrong to call the Bassoon “the clown of the orchestra”, and a *Times* critic in 1925 wrote an excellent defence of what he termed “the gentleman of the orchestra”. Whimsical grace, a combination of agility and dignity, a capacity to portray melancholy, roguishness, drollery, mystery, plaintiveness—from what other instrument can we demand and obtain all these? Such then is the versatility of the bassoon, “revealing an unusual sensibility which has been abused by the buffoons of orchestration, but has endeared him as a gentleman of character to the great composers among whom Mozart and Beethoven have done him most honour.”

The Contrabassoon³⁷

(Fr. Contrebasson: Ger. Contrafagott: Ital. Contrafagotto)

Zacconi in 1592 stated that, besides the Fagotto Chorista (*i.e.* the type instrument of the Dulzians) there was another a little higher and another a little deeper. Praetorius in 1618, as shown above, described and depicted two varieties of Doppel Fagott, the Quart-Fagott descending to G, and the Quint Fagott descending to F.

Sorduns

The sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries also had the strange double-reed instruments known as Sorduns. The bore, however, was cylindrical doubled on itself, and the instruments must not be confused with the conically bored Dulzians.

Doppel Fagott

The use of both the Quart Fagott (for sharp keys) and the Quint Fagott (for flat keys) is recommended by Praetorius, who proceeds to inform us that the Meister who made the Octave Trombone, (*i.e.* Hans Schreiber, Kammermusikus of the Electoral Court of Berlin) was said to be at work on a large "Fagot Contra" which would sound a fourth below the Quint-Fagott (*i.e.* an octave below the Chorist-Fagott) accordingly descending to C: (sixteen foot C). "Should he succeed", writes Praetorius, "it will be a splendid instrument the like of which has never before been seen, and it will really be something to marvel at." Organ-builders had attempted to produce the lowest two notes, sixteen foot C and D on the trombone stop, but their qualified success led Praetorius to conclude "Die Zeit wirds geben" (Time will show).

Schreiber may have succeeded, for a Contrafagott is mentioned in 1626 in the Inventar of the Barfüsserkirche, Frankfurt a. M. The boring of wooden trunks of such large size presented practical difficulties, and, moreover, the note-holes had to be bored through the tube-wall disproportionately small and obliquely so that the fingers could reach and cover them. The results satisfied neither the player nor the audience and for over two centuries and a half the Contrabassoon was the "Schmerzenskind" (child of affliction) of instrument-makers.

Two excellent specimens of so-called Doppelfagott, probably of late sixteenth century Italian origin, are preserved with six Dulzians in Vienna. Both are held with right hand above left, the contrary of the modern bassoon and are in A, a minor third below the Chorist Fagott. These were, however, for use with an organ of this pitch. It may be noted that on two occasions Bach was led to treat the Bassoon as a transposing instrument—in Cantata No. 131, sounding a tone lower, where the Organ was tuned to Chorton, and in Cantata No. 150, sounding a minor third lower for an organ tuned to Cornett Ton.

Early Use of Doppelfagott

A Quartfagott, three Fagotti and two Pommers supplied the accompaniment of a song at a Musical Festival held at Nuremberg in 1643.

Bach's earliest use of a Doppelfagott is in Cantata No. 31 of (1715) in which G: often occurs, necessitating a Quart

Fagott. In *St. John Passion* (of 1723) he prescribes "Continuo pro Bassono Grosso", using a compass, however, of only C—? which the Chorist-Fagott could provide. From Bach's sparing use of the Doppelfagott, we may confidently assume that its tone was weak and poor, though one must also remember the frequently slender instrumental resources at his disposal.

A genuine sixteenth century Doppelfagott is preserved in the Heyer Collection, Leipzig. It is a large two-keyed Dulzian, four ft. five ins. high, descending to Contra F or Contra G (the Catalogue is not precise on the point). A facsimile in the Heckel Museum is said to descend to Contra A flat. At Salzburg there is an Italian Contrafagotto, six ft. in height, but despite the fact that it is stamped "Joannes Maria Anciuti Invenit et Fecit/Midiolani/MDCCXXXII", and, above, a winged lion, the instrument must have been considerably altered, for it has nine keys and a bell consisting of a dragon-head with flexible tongue, in fashion a century later. No bassoon-type of 1732 had more than four keys.

In Eighteenth-century England

The earliest record of the Contra in England was in Handel's *Hymn for the Coronation* in 1727, and for this the composer asked Stanesby Senior, the London wood-wind maker, to make a Contra eight ft. high. Lampe, Handel's bassoonist, was to play it, but, for want of a reed or other cause, no use was made of it.

In 1739 an evening concert at Marylebone Gardens was advertised, at which two Double Bassoons by Stanesby Senior were included, "the greatness of whose sound surpasses that of any other bass instrument whatsoever: never performed with before".

A single surviving Contra of this type is in Dublin, and is stamped "Stanesby Junior, London, 1739". As Stanesby Senior died in 1734 it seems odd that his Contras should in 1739 be announced as "never performed with before". Stanesby Junior, born in 1692, died in 1754, surviving his father by twenty years.

Handel included the Contra again in *L'Allegro* (1740) where it doubles the second bassoon an octave lower (written compass F—b flat); and in the *Firework Music* (1749). It is significant that Handel dispenses with the notes below F, which were doubtless uncertain and weak or of bad quality.

No more is heard of the Contra in England until 1784 on

the occasion of the first Handel Commemoration in Westminster Abbey²⁸ at which an orchestra of two hundred and fifty included six flutes, twenty-six oboes, twenty-six bassoons and a double bassoon. The double bassoon player on this occasion was Ashley, first bassoon at Covent Garden Theatre, but, according to Parke²⁹, who was principal oboe at the Festival, Ashley was no more successful than Lampe had been in 1727. The Contra "which had never been *heard* was never again *seen* after these performances." Parke, however, was unduly scathing and the Contra re-appeared in the Fourth Handel Festival in 1787. Ashley performed upon it at the Three Choirs Festival at Worcester in 1788.

In Nineteenth-century England

Once more at Worcester in 1803 we hear of one, Jenkinson, playing the double bassoon, but thereafter it appears to have gone completely out of use. There is no mention of it at the festivals in the 1820's, e.g. York, Birmingham, Liverpool, etc.

The next practical attempt at a serviceable Contra was that of J. Samme of London who, c. 1855, made an eight-keyed Quart-Bassoon in low G, preserved in the Donaldson Collection of the R.C.M. This Contra (it may be described as a Semi-Contra), has recently been played at rehearsals in Symphony work by Anthony Baines, the accomplished London Bassoon and Contra player, who states that its tone is excellent, blending well, and it enables second bassoon parts to be played with greater facility as the fingers can play notes which would, on the bassoon, necessitate the use of the thumbs. The player has, of course, to transpose a fourth up.

The Contra Abroad

Belgium: A Contra by Tuerlinckx, Malines, preserved in Brussels is of maple wood, five ft. eight ins. high, has five keys and descends to C. By making the Contra in C all difficulty as regards transposition was removed and fingering became uniform on the bassoon and the contra.

Austria and Germany: It appears that until about 1850 the inclusion of the Contra in scores depended entirely on whether it was locally available. Vienna, however, seems to have been able to provide the Contra, and thus we find it employed, if rarely, by Haydn and Beethoven. The Contra was, however, still defective and was at first considered more suitable for

military music, in which the Serpent and Ophicleide were in favour. Continental references to the contra are not always reliable, for confusion occurred with the *Russisches Fagott* (a form of wooden Bass-Horn), and Berlioz in 1842 met a German player who called his instrument a double-bassoon although it was in reality a Russisches Fagott! In Vienna in 1807 a Contra player was on the pay-roll of the Court Orchestra, and Beethoven employed two Contras at Vienna in 1814, while in 1843 four Contras were used there in a performance of Haydn's *Creation*. In 1838 Weprecht's reformed infantry bands included two Bassoons and two Contras and in 1848 Austrian infantry bands included four bassoons and two contras.

The Contra in the Classical Orchestra

Mozart used the Contra in the Masonic Dirge (K 477) composed in 1785, and in the opening passage for wind instruments, the Contra part is very telling. Contra C occurs in bar four, and in the seventh last and last bars; g is the upper limit.

Haydn's use of it in *Die Sieben Worte*. . .(1786) is noteworthy but the composition is seldom heard. The Contra is important in the Largo in A minor and in the Terremoto. Contra C is the lowest note. In *Creation* (1795-8) Sub-Contra B flat occurs in the well-known passage "By heavy beasts the ground was trod" and again in "Sing to the Lord". In *The Seasons* (1799-1800) Haydn reverts to Contra C as the downward limit.

Schubert only once included the Contra in a short *Trauermusik* of 1813—probably an exercise in writing for wind, set by Salieri.

Beethoven used the Contra in the fifth and ninth Symphonies, but the florid passages in the latter are quite unsuited to the nature of the instrument. It occurs in two Marches in F (1809), Overtures *King Stephen* and *Ruins of Athens*, Polonaise in D, Ecossaise in D, Mass in D, a Military March in D (1816), and in the gravedigging scene in *Fidelio*, pp with the Double Basses. The compass in the Ninth Symphony is E flat to a' sounding an octave lower, and the contra is distinctly heard in the first eight bars of the *Allegro assai vivace* where two bassoons and Contra in octaves on B flat and Bass Drum re-iterate the note. Forsyth has remarked that "unless very carefully played", it "only just misses being grotesque".

Use in France

The Contra was not in use in the early years of the nineteenth century, but Nicolo's *Aladin* (1822) included a part for it, and by 1825 it was much in demand in French military bands following German and Austrian custom. In 1863 the Société des Concerts du Conservatoire acquired the only French-made Contra, and from 1867 to 1894 the operas of Verdi, Saint-Saens, Ambroise Thomas, Reyer and Massenet included Contra parts.

The Sarrusophone

Although this invention of Sarrus, bandmaster of the French 13th Regiment in 1856*, was intended for military use, a Contrabass in C was employed to replace the Contra in the orchestra, e.g. Saint-Saens in 1867 (*Les Noces de Prométhée*), etc., and Massenet in 1889 (*Esclarmonde*). The wide metal bore and large note-holes produce a powerful but unrefined tone, and the Sarrusophone has therefore been rarely used in the orchestra, though Ravel, Delius and Holbrooke have employed it. It is curious that in U.S.A. it is now being manufactured and used for military work quite considerably.

Other Types of Contra

The Contra passed through a bewildering number of shapes and sizes in the nineteenth century. (See Figs. 10 & 11.) Space does not admit of more than a brief résumé of these. In the 1830's Stehle of Vienna produced a fifteen-keyed brass Contra five ft. six ins. high. Though the tone was powerful, the technique was difficult, and this led Moritz of Berlin in 1845 to invent the Claviatur-Contra—a precursor of the Piano-accordion in so far as the fifteen keys were operated by a keyboard of black and white touches. Though highly praised and actually patented in 1856, this strange Contra was never in general use and no surviving specimen is known. Schölnast of Pressburg (now Bratislava, CSR) was next to produce, in 1839, his brass Contra which he named *Tritonikon* or *Universal-Kontrabass*. Fifteen keys, arranged in piano fashion, gave a chromatic compass from D₁ to F, but restricted tone and imperfect intonation led to the abandonment of this type. Next was Cerveny of Königgratz, Bohemia, who in 1856 produced a Tritonikon in E flat claimed to be an improvement upon Schölnast's model. Next Cerveny made a B flat model and exhibited it at Paris in 1867 and 1889. The tone was powerful

* Grove's Dictionary is in error in stating 1863.

but very vibrant, having little analogy with the true Contrabassoon.

It was Mahillon of Brussels who was next in the field in 1868 with his seventeen-keyed brass Contrebasse-à-anche, having its lowest note D₁ instead of B₁ flat but in other respects identical with Cerveny's model.

These metal contras had the disadvantage of special mechanism and were not true Contrabassoons as they did not reproduce the notes of the Bassoon in the Contra octave with the fingering of the Bassoon. Hence arose the difficulty of persuading bassoon-players to adopt them.

In 1855 Muller of Lyons invented a Contrebasse-à-anche—the Mullerphone—with cylindro-conical bore, metal bell, and special key arrangement, but it proved a failure.

Haseneier of Coblenz in 1847 had designed a wooden Contra of an entirely new type. (Fig. 10e.) Named Contrabassophon it was tested publicly in 1849 and was destined to hold its own for half a century. The model was copied in Germany by Geipel of Breslau, Doelling of Potsdam, and Berthold & Söhne of Speyer-am-Rhein, the latter's being of papier-mâché to reduce the weight. Alfred Morton of London circa 1875 produced three or four copies of the Haseneier model and one was played by his eldest son at the Crystal Palace Concerts, Richter Concerts and the Opera House. Three were used respectively in the Coldstream, Grenadier and Scots (Fusilier) Guards and it is interesting to learn that the instrument played in the Scots Guards by an old player, Davies, is now in the Donaldson Collection at the R.C.M. All three models went down to Contra C, but Fontaine-Besson of Paris in 1890 patented his model which reached Sub-Contra B flat. The introduction of the Haseneier Contra to English orchestras was due to Dr. W. H. Stone (1830-91) an accomplished amateur performer on Tenoroon, Bassoon and Contra, and author of the articles on these and other instruments in the first and second editions of Grove's Dictionary. He played the Haseneier Contra at the Handel Festival of 1871 and his instrument, shown at the London Exhibitions of 1885 and 1890, is at present in the writer's care. The tube is truly conical, sixteen ft. four ins. in length, enlarging from $\frac{1}{4}$ in. to four in. and curved four times on itself, reducing the height to four ft. eight in. Extreme compass—three octaves C₁ to c⁴, but g is a safer upward limit. The tone is very vibrant and powerful—really aggressive and difficult to subdue. All holes are covered,



Fig. 10

Mus. d. Gesell. d. Musikfr., Vienna, 170, 172, 171

(a) Contra by W. Horák, Prag. c. 1830. Ht. 5 ft. 1 in. Five brass keys. Double butt. Entirely of wood. Lowest note: Contra C.

(b) Contra by unknown Austrian maker, mid nineteenth cent. Ht. 5 ft. 6 ins. Ten brass keys. Both this and succeeding instrument have a coiled brass crook, flared brass bell, and lowest note Contra C.

(c) Contra by Schölnast, Pressburg. Early 19th cent. Ht. 5 ft. 2 ins. Six brass keys.

Heyer Collection, Leipzig University, 1406, 1403

(d) Contrabassoon by Heckel, Biebrich, c. 1877. Ht. 4 ft. Stritter system: played right hand above left, but usual fingering. Lowest note: Contra C.

(e) Contrabassophon by H. J. Haseneier, Coblenz, c. 1849. Ht. 4 ft. 8 ins. Nineteen brass keys. Wide bore and large holes. Lowest note: Contra C.

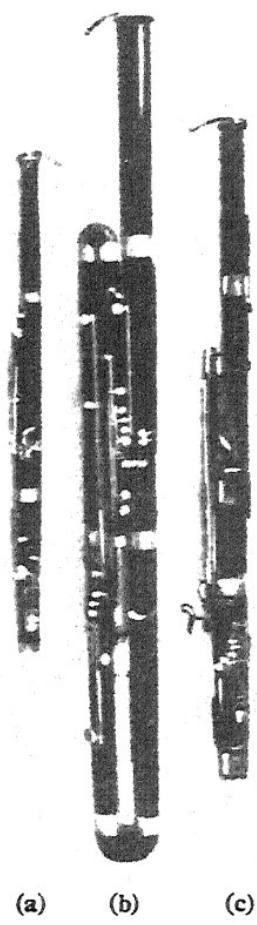


Fig. 11

Leeds Municipal Museum

(a) Tenoroon by Buffet-Crampon, Paris, c. 1900.

(b) Contrabassoon by Heckel, Biebrich, c. 1896. Ht. 5 ft. 4 ins. Lowest note: Contra C.

(c) Bassoon by Heckel, Biebrich, c. 1912. Crutch (support) for right hand.

but saddle-shaped touches, for what are holes on the bassoon, enable a bassoon-player to transfer to the Contra with complete ease. Herr Heckel, who has a Berthold copy in his museum, describes the tone as "ophikleidenartig-kurz-klingend und nicht fagottartigtragend". The Haseneier Contra has been obsolete since the 1890's, yet it was described and depicted in Prout's *Orchestra* and has been retained in the new edition—a curious error.

J. A. Heckel (1812-77) and his son commenced in 1876 to transform his Contra, until then of bassoon-shape but descending only to Contra D. The earliest type was named after one of Heckel's workmen who patented it in his own name—Stritter System. (Fig. 10d). It had a curiously confusing technique, being played at the left side with left hand below right, though both had the same movements as on the bassoon—*i.e.*, only the position of the hands differed. A later Stritter model was made in normal fashion and the writer has played such a specimen in London. A Dresden professor named Braeunlich in 1886 designed a Contra which was made by Meyer of Hanover, and much was made of the fact that it descended to B_{II} flat and B_{II} natural, but no specimen appears to have survived. A similar fate overtook a monstrous *Subkontrafagott* in B flat invented by Cerveny in 1873. Presumably of brass, for military use, it descended to B_{III} flat—sixty-four

foot B flat—an almost incredible depth for sound production by human lips and lungs. No known specimen survives.

Modern German Contra

It is to Heckel of Biebrich that we owe the series of Contra types from circa 1834 until 1879 when the modern Contra may be said to have been perfected. In that year it was played to Wagner who expressed warm approval of it, but as only *Parsifal* was composed thereafter, it is only in that work he employed the Contra, though Richter added it in others of Wagner's works. For some unknown reason, Wagner writes for the Contra in *Parsifal* at actual pitch.

The tall bassoon-shape, descending to Contra D, gave place to the coiled Stritter model (to Contra C), succeeded almost at once by a coiled model with normal fingering and a vertical wooden bell (still only to Contra C). No precise date can be stated for the downward extension to Sub-Contra B flat, further extended circa 1900 to Sub-Contra A, the lowest note on the pianoforte and the lowest note in the orchestra. An inverted metal bell is added to the wooden bell-joint and there are half a dozen shapes including a very compact coiled model for military use. The large metal crook has a water-key, and a tuning-slide, as the Contra on account of its dimensions (nineteen ft. five in. long for Sub-Contra A) is specially sensitive to variations of temperature. A wooden bell-rim can be fitted when Contra C is the lowest note required. (Fig. 11b.)

Modern French Contra

Triébert and Marzoli of Paris about 1860 made a bassoon-shaped Contra nearly eight ft. high. Goumas of Paris, and Evette and Schaeffer after 1885, made another of similar size. In 1889 M. Thibouville aîné exhibited an improved brass contra coiled in four parallel lengths. By fitting nineteen keys and six finger-plates, the fingering of the French bassoon was retained. Buffet-Crampon & Cie. made a similar brass Contra, but the success of the Heckel Contra led them to manufacture the French wooden Contra, resembling the German type but retaining French fingering. This type was first heard in Paris about 1906 in Strauss' *Salome*, in which, as also in *Elektra*, there occur Contra solos of considerable difficulty. The Buffet Contra has the usual wooden bell rim for Contra C and inverted metal bell for Sub-Contra B flat.

The Contra in England

In 1890 it would seem that there were in London only two orchestral Contra-players, Morton (above-mentioned) and Dr. Stone, both using the wide-bored Haseneier type. It was natural that in the early 1900's the French type should quickly gain favour as French bassoon fingering was most general. Later the taste for German bassoon tone induced professional players even to change from the French, and naturally German-type Contras were introduced and are to-day almost universal in British orchestras.

Orchestral Use

The Contra may be regarded as indispensable in every major modern work, but too often, outside London, there is a tendency to dispense with it, sometimes on grounds of economy, but also because of the comparative rarity of the instrument. For example, there are probably only three in Scotland (two [Heckel] in Glasgow, and one [Buffet] in Edinburgh).

Brahms makes fine use of it in the First, Third and Fourth Symphonies and in the St. Anthony Variations; Strauss in *Ein Heldenleben*, *Don Juan*, *Salome* and *Elektra*, Rimsky-Korsakov in *Coq d'Or*. Tschaikovsky strangely ignores the Contra though before him Glinka included an excellent part in the Overture to *Russlan and Ludmilla*, (1842). Dukas lets us hear the Contra in *L'Apprenti Sorcier*; Ravel in *Mère l'Oye* gives the Contra a solo up to a, Beethoven's and Brahms' upper limit, but the tone there is almost useless. Holst (*The Planets*), Respighi (*Pine Trees of Rome*), Elgar (in *Gerontius* and many other works), Bax, Vaughan Williams (in *Job*, etc.), Parry, Stanford, Delius, Sullivan (*Martyr of Antioch*), have all included the Contra.

The Register of the Contra

The tone from Sub-Contra B flat to E (actual sounds) is soft and smooth and is valuable in providing six notes below the range of the normal double-bass. From E to G the tone commences to lose resonance and from G to f the notes sound forced and dull, and can be blown with less effort and better effect on the bassoon. The Contra, however, is a valuable extra instrument and it may be hoped that when importation from abroad is more general, there may be an increase in the number of bassoon-players to possess and play one.

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